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ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 41

THE WASHINGTON POST
31 January 1982

Cries and Whispers— Washington Leaks All

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Special to the Washington Post

THE SCREECH of the White House leak pluggers is abroad in the land. I can remember its peculiar timbre all the way back to the Truman days. Real old-timers still hear its echoes from the Hoover administration.

The leak seekers never learn. They are the kind of people who wear Gucci shoes and natural-shoulder, hand-tailored suits, but they keep epaulets under their pillows.

They don't understand the leakers because they don't understand the public's love-hate affair with the newspapers. Leakers are like ear syringes. The more pressure one puts on them, the more they squirt into our ears.

For 30 years now, my ears have been awash with leaks, with Jack Anderson, but also with the Hearst newspapers, The Washington Post and others. Where most people hear ringing in their ears after they pass 50, I hear whispering.

President Reagan and his mahouts are baffled by the psychology of leaks. Reagan complains that leaks are at "a new high here . . . leaks that are destructive of the foreign policy."

Assistant Defense Secretary Henry E. Catto Jr. huffs about "the principle of the thing . . . the expression of minority [policy] opinions via leaks." White House spokesmen David R. Gergen and Larry Speakes try to explain why practically every agency head from the CIA to Fish and Wildlife wants hunt-and-destroy missions against leakers.

And then there is the dumbfounding sight of Deputy Defense Secretary Frank C. Carlucci volunteering

to prove he didn't leak secrets from a meeting he chaired.

Why do leakers leak? They do it for a variety of reasons. Presidents do it to get their thoughts across without having to take responsibility for them. Or as trial balloons. Or sometimes, they, being no more decent than the rest of us, use leaks to destroy their enemies.

Cabinet members and agency heads tend to follow the presidential psychology on leaks. While lesser folk may leak out of friendship, idealism, even whimsy, at the top level the motive is more often self-interest, malice and anger. Whatever it is, it is Washington free enterprise in action.

Leakers come in many archetypes. There are the Idealists, the Avenging Friends and Mad Bombers.

At its most artistic, leaking is a form of expression that can rival the *grands jetes* of Baryshnikov, the cadenza of a Chopin or the brush stroke of an El Greco.

'Capital of Leaks'

The master of the leak-qua-art is Lyn Nofziger, the waggish Til Eulenspiegel of this otherwise self-important administration. It is worth noting that he just jumped ship with a remark about his rat-like prescience.

Nofziger understands that hanging leakers may require a two-branched gibbet and one of the branches may be the present executive branch. Nofziger knows his history. He lived it.

After all, a Watergate document informs us that "Whenever possible Nofziger" — then a high Nixon official — "planted stories favorable to the Nixon administration with news-

nien, on his own or at the request of [H.R.] Haldeman . . ."

The document goes on:

"After the California primary, Nofziger sent a person from the Committee to Re-Elect the President into the California McGovern office . . . in an attempt to find a form which purportedly told McGovern volunteers how to get on welfare." Had Nofziger's ingenuity paid off, which it didn't, he would surely have leaked it to a friendly reporter.

Indeed, he generally was more successful. In another caper before he joined the Reagan White House, he used a chain of friendships to squeeze documents from the office of a rival presidential candidate.

To his delight, they showed that the seemingly prim and proper aspirant had misused federal funds. Nofziger leaked the documents to a reporter. The story made the candidate look like a hypocrite and probably was a factor in his dismal primaries showing.

Nofziger is anything but unique. Leaking in Washington is good business. Richard L. Strout of the Christian Science Monitor, who calls it the "Capital of Leaks," recounts how an irate President Kennedy once ordered his press man, Pierre Salinger, to root out a leak. Salinger gleefully reported back that Kennedy himself was the culprit.

More ominously, Bobby Kennedy's Justice Department went to considerable lengths to ruin what was left of Jimmy Hoffa's tarnished reputation. When the Teamsters boss was arrested for slugging a weaker aide, a Justice official leaked out the news even before the police reports were typed up.

The beat reporters at Washington's Metropolitan Police headquarters were staggered to see a herd of political reporters arriving at the booking desk on a story they them-